United Nations A/AC.172/1999/L.1

General Assembly

Distr.: Limited
13 April 1999

Original: English

Committee on Conferences
Organizational session for 1999

Annotated provisional agenda for the organizational session for 1999

1. Adoption of the agenda for the organizational session for 1999.
2. Election of officers.
3. Organization of work for 1999.
4. Programme of work for 1999.
5. Adoption of the agenda for the substantive session of 1999.
6. Other business.

Annotations

1. Adoption of the agenda for the organizational session for 1999

2. Election of officers

Rule 103 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly provides that committees other than Main Committees shall elect a Chairman, one or more Vice-Chairmen and a Rapporteur. These officers shall be elected on the basis of equitable geographical distribution, experience and personal competence.

In past years, the Committee on Conferences has elected, in addition to the Chairman, three Vice-Chairmen and a Rapporteur.

At its organizational session for 1989, on 1 March 1989, the Committee agreed in principle that thenceforth the chairmanship would rotate annually among the regional groups.

3. Organization of work for 1999

At its 341st meeting, on 27 August 1992, the Committee on Conferences decided to maintain its biennial programme of work, dealing with items relating to documentation in

99-10378 (E) 150499

even-numbered years and those relating to meetings in odd-numbered years. The Committee also decided that some items would be considered on an annual basis.

At its organizational session for 1998, on 14 April 1998, the Committee adopted its agenda for 1998 and requested the Secretariat to submit a draft agenda for 1999 to the Committee at its organizational session in 1999.

In paragraph 4 of its resolution 46/190 A of 20 December 1991, the General Assembly took note of the guidelines adopted by the Committee on Conferences with regard to inter-sessional departures from the approved calendar of conferences and meetings.[1] At its substantive session of 1994, the Committee decided that requests for inter-sessional departures submitted to the Committee should, in future, be reviewed by the Bureau, in consultation with the Secretariat, for subsequent action. At its substantive session of 1995, the Committee decided that requests for inter-sessional departures submitted to the Committee that involved a change of venue should be referred to the members for approval. Departures that involved other types of changes should, as the Committee had decided at its substantive session of 1994, be reviewed by the Bureau, in consultation with the Secretary, for subsequent action.

Moreover, meetings of the Committee may be required in compliance with paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 35/10 A of 3 November 1980, by which all proposals affecting the schedule of conferences and meetings made at sessions of the Assembly are to be reviewed by the Committee when administrative implications are being considered under the requirements of rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the Assembly.

4. Programme of work for 1999

The terms of reference of the Committee are set forth in paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 43/222 B of 21 December 1988. As noted above, the Committee adopted its agenda for 1998 at its organizational session for 1998 and requested the Secretariat to present a draft agenda for 1999 to the Committee at its organizational session for 1999.

Annexed to the present document is the draft agenda for 1999, followed by annotations, which takes into account the earlier decisions of the Committee and subsequent decisions and resolutions of the General Assembly. The Committee may also wish to determine the timing and duration of its substantive session of 1999 and to specify the documentation requirements.

5. Adoption of the agenda for the substantive session of 1999

6. Other business

Participation of observers

At its 413th meeting, on 4 September 1998, the matter of low attendance by delegations at meetings of the Committee was raised. The Committee recommended that, following the organizational session of 1999, a letter should be transmitted to all members in order to make them aware of the problem and to encourage their participation in its deliberations. The letter should also contain information about the briefing session that would be convened by the secretariat of the Committee with a view to familiarizing members with various aspects of the Committee's work and to encouraging them to attend.

At the same meeting, the matter of attendance and participation in the work of the Committee by observers was raised. The view was expressed that interested delegations that were not members of the Committee should be encouraged to participate, particularly

in the light of the low attendance on the part of members. The view was also expressed that, while non-members might attend meetings, which were in fact open to all delegations, participation by observers would inevitably result in lengthier sessions. The Committee took the decision to defer the matter to its organizational session for 1999.

Furthermore, in paragraph 1 of resolution 53/208 A of 18 December 1998, the General Assembly encouraged members of the Committee on Conferences to participate in the work of the Committee and, in paragraph 2, invited the Committee on Conferences to consider the question of the participation of observers in the work of the Committee in accordance with the relevant rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

The Committee may wish to consider the matter at its organizational session of 1999.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 32* (A/46/32 and Corr.1 and Add.1), para. 77.

Annex

Draft agenda for the substantive session of 1999

1. Adoption of the agenda.
2. Calendar of conferences and meetings:
   (a) Adoption of the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2000–2001;
   (b) Consideration of the proposal to avoid holding meetings by United Nations bodies on lunar New Year's Day;
   (c) Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources:
      (i) Meeting statistics of United Nations organs;
      (ii) Consultations with bodies concerning utilization of the conference services available to them;
      (iii) Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States;
      (iv) Cost-accounting system for conference services;
      (v) Subsidiary bodies authorized to meet away from their established headquarters in accordance with section I, paragraph 4, of General Assembly resolution 40/243;
      (vi) Improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi;
      (vii) Improved coordination of conference services;
   (d) Requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243;
   (e) Consideration of the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of subsidiary organs of the Economic and Social Council for 2000–2001;
   (f) Review of administrative instruction ST/AI/342 of 8 May 1987 on guidelines for the preparation of host Government agreements falling under General Assembly resolution 40/243.
3. Control and limitation of documentation:
   (a) Review of the late issuance of documentation; study on relationship between late issuance of documentation and low utilization of conference services; detailed data on reasons for delays and analysis of additional costs/financial implications of late submission;
   (b) Provision of written meeting records to subsidiary organs of the General Assembly;
   (c) Translation-related matters;
   (d) Continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites.
4. Review of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000–2001: Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services:
   (a) Analysis of problems related to career development in language services and review of vacancy rates in language services at some duty stations.
5. Organization of work.
6. Adoption of the report.

* * *

Annotations

1. Adoption of the agenda

2. Calendar of conferences and meetings:

(a) Adoption of the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2000–2001

The Committee on Conferences will submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings for 2000–2001.

A draft biennial calendar will be submitted by the Secretariat to the Committee at its substantive session of 1999.

(b) Consideration of the proposal to avoid holding meetings by United Nations bodies on lunar New Year's Day

In paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution 53/208 A of 18 December 1998, the Assembly requested the Committee on Conferences to consider, at its next session, the proposal that United Nations bodies should avoid holding meetings on lunar New Year's Day.

(c) Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources:

(i) Meeting statistics of United Nations organs

Since 1983, the Committee on Conferences has studied a series of reports showing the meeting statistics of a number of United Nations organs in New York, Geneva and Vienna. In accordance with paragraph 7 of General Assembly resolution 48/222 A of 23 December 1993, the information includes analyses of trends and figures on the utilization of conference-servicing resources and this year will be expanded to include Nairobi.

In compliance with the foregoing requests, the Secretariat will submit to the Committee at its substantive session of 1999 a report on meeting statistics of United Nations organs.

(ii) Consultations with bodies concerning utilization of the conference services available to them

At its substantive session of 1998, the Committee requested its Chairperson to continue to consult on its behalf with the chairpersons of bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure (80 per cent) of their allocated resources for the past three sessions, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources. In paragraph 24 of its resolution 53/208 A the General Assembly requested that the Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences transmit a letter to the chairpersons of all bodies that had utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated conference resources in the previous year, informing them of the problem and drawing their attention to the significant loss of meeting time, with a view to encouraging appropriate action on their part so as to improve the utilization of conference resources.

The Secretariat will report orally on the matter.

(iii) Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

In paragraph 28 of resolution 53/208 A, the General Assembly decided to include all necessary resources in the budget for the next biennium to provide interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groupings, on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice, and requested the Secretary-General to

submit to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, through the Committee on Conferences, a report on the implementation of that decision.

The Secretariat will provide a written report in compliance with the above request.

(iv) Cost accounting

In paragraph 3 of its resolution 53/208 D, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report at the earliest opportunity, taking into account the observations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions contained in paragraph 10 of its report (see A/53/507).

Since the preparation of the report requested above would involve extensive consultation with and assistance from the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts and perhaps external consultants, it is not possible at this time to indicate when the Secretariat would be in a position to produce it.

(v) Subsidiary bodies authorized to meet away from their established headquarters in accordance with section I, paragraph 4, of General Assembly resolution 40/243

In paragraph 8 of its resolution 53/208 A, the General Assembly decided that waivers to the headquarters rule would be granted solely on the basis of the calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations recommended by the Committee on Conferences for adoption by the Assembly. In paragraph 9, the Assembly invited all its subsidiary bodies that are authorized to meet away from their established headquarters to keep under review the exception to the headquarters rule in the light of their current work situation and to report any changes to the Assembly through the Committee on Conferences. Any information so received will be transmitted to the Committee.

(vi) Improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

In paragraphs 17 and 18 of its resolution 53/208 A, the General Assembly expressed concern that the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi were still underutilized, as recorded during the period 1996–1997 and reiterated its call for better utilization of the conference facilities at Nairobi. In paragraphs 19 and 20, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to explore the possibility of establishing a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, and to examine the provision of interpretation services to other locations from permanent interpretation structures based in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi.

The Secretariat will take appropriate action in compliance with the above-mentioned requests.

Moreover, in paragraph 21 of its resolution 53/208 A, the General Assembly invited all subsidiary bodies of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Commission on Human Settlements and encouraged Member States, intergovernmental bodies and regional and other major groupings to consider increasing their use of the conference facilities at Nairobi. In paragraph 22, the Assembly reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to assist the aforementioned bodies in improving that situation and requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, through the Committee on Conferences, on the actions taken to that end.

The Secretariat will submit a report on its continuing efforts in this regard.

(vii) Improved coordination of conference services

In paragraph 15 of its resolution 51/211 A of 18 December 1996, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to ensure closer cooperation between Headquarters, the United Nations

Office at Geneva, the United Nations Office at Vienna and the United Nations Office at Nairobi in order to improve the coordination of conference services. In paragraph 16, the Assembly requested the Secretariat to engage on a regular basis in an active dialogue with Member States as a permanent feature at Headquarters, as well as at the United Nations offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, in order to improve the coordination of conference services. This request was reiterated at the substantive sessions of 1997 and 1998 of the Committee on Conferences.

Moreover, at its substantive session of 1998, the Committee took note with appreciation of the efforts made to implement new technologies, particularly in the areas of remote interpretation and translation, and encouraged the Secretary-General to pursue such efforts. The Committee supported the new organizational structure of conference services, which allowed for more effective coordination among the four United Nations conference-servicing centres in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi with a view to determining the most cost-effective option for the Organization, while ensuring the required standard of services.

In addition, in paragraph 37 of resolution 53/208 A, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to review administrative instruction ST/AI/342 of 8 May 1987 on guidelines for the preparation of host Government agreements falling under General Assembly resolution 40/243 so as to reflect the new organizational structure.

The Secretariat will report orally on its efforts to ensure effective coordination between the four United Nations conference-servicing centres.

(d) Requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243

In paragraph 15 of its resolution 47/202 A of 22 December 1992, the General Assembly demanded that all subsidiary organs of the Assembly comply with the provisions of section I, paragraph 7, of its resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1985, by which it had decided that no subsidiary organ of the Assembly would meet at United Nations Headquarters during a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

In accordance with the procedure established by the Committee at its 1986 session and reaffirmed at its 1992 session, chairpersons of subsidiary organs of the General Assembly that wish to meet at Headquarters during regular sessions of the Assembly submit their requests to the Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences.

A conference room paper will be prepared by the Secretariat so that the Committee may consider requests received in this regard.

(e) Consideration of the draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of subsidiary organs of the Economic and Social Council for 2000–2001

The Economic and Social Council, in adopting its decision 1988/103 of 5 February 1988, invited the Committee to review the Council's draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings and to submit, as appropriate, its recommendations thereon to the Council. The draft calendar for the biennium 2000–2001, which is to be presented to the Council at its substantive session in July 1999, is expected to be available for consideration by the Committee in June 1999. The Committee may wish to consider meeting at that time in order to discuss the draft and to convey its observations to the Council.

3. Control and limitation of documentation:

(a) Review of the late issuance of documentation

In paragraphs 2 to 8 of its resolution 53/208 B, the General Assembly addressed the late issuance of documentation and requested the Secretariat to take certain actions, including a study on the possible relationship between the late issuance of documentation and the low utilization of conference services by some bodies, the indication of the reasons for the delay when a report is introduced, and the inclusion of a footnote to the document if a report is submitted late to conference services.

Furthermore, in paragraph 9 of resolution 53/208 B, the General Assembly endorsed the request of the Committee on Conferences to the Secretariat that a report containing detailed data on the reasons for delays in the issuance of documentation and an analysis of the additional costs incurred by document-processing services and of other financial implications of the late submission and issuance of documents be presented to the Committee at its 1999 substantive session.

The Secretariat will submit a conference room paper on the matter at the substantive session of 1999.

(b) Provision of written meeting records to subsidiary organs of the General Assembly

In paragraph 18 of resolution 53/208 B, the General Assembly requested the Secretariat to continue consultations with the secretariats of intergovernmental bodies with a view to informing them on the speedy issuance of unedited verbatim transcripts and the cost savings derived therefrom, and encouraging them to follow the example of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space in carrying out the experiment with unedited verbatim transcripts, so as to enable the Committee on Conferences to make final recommendations on the matter.

Moreover, in paragraph 21, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to ensure that summary and verbatim records are issued in all six official languages concurrently.

The Secretariat will report orally on the implementation of these provisions.

(c) Translation-related matters

In paragraph 20 of resolution 53/208 B, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to improve the quality of the translation of documents into the six official languages in a timely manner. In paragraph 22, it further requested the Secretary-General to continue his efforts, where appropriate, to introduce new technologies such as machine-assisted translation and common terminology databases while ensuring that there are no adverse effects on the quality of documentation and translation. In paragraph 23, the Assembly encouraged the Secretariat to continue its efforts to improve quality and proficiency in all six translation services.

In addition, in paragraph 25, the Assembly expressed concern over continued high rates of self-revision during peak workload periods and occasional inadequate translations, which had sometimes hampered the work of delegations, and emphasized the importance of continuous training for all translators at all duty stations and of developing measures to provide translators with increased support from submitting offices and secretariats. In paragraph 28, the Assembly encouraged the Secretariat to continue its efforts to ensure effective linguistic quality control through to the final stage of document production and distribution and to report to the Committee on Conferences on the steps taken in that regard.

The Secretariat will report orally on developments in these areas.

Moreover, in paragraph 26, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the post of reviser is provided in the six official languages in accordance with paragraph 19 of section B of its resolution 52/214 of 22 December 1997 and to report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

(d) Continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites

In paragraphs 5 and 6 of resolution 53/208 C, the Assembly stressed the need for the continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites, with a view to achieving equal treatment of the six official languages on those Web sites, and requested the Secretary-General to submit proposals in this connection to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session through the Committee on Conferences and the Committee on Information.

The Department of Public Information is preparing the above-mentioned report, which will be submitted to the Committee on Information at is twenty-first session in May 1999, and subsequently to the Committee on Conferences at its substantive session of 1999.

4. Review of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000–2001: Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services

At its 327th meeting, on 12 June 1991, the Committee decided to review the relevant programme narrative of the proposed programme budget for conference services, and to provide its views thereon to the General Assembly.

In the light of that decision, the Secretariat will submit to the Committee, for consideration at its substantive session of 1999, the relevant programme narrative of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000–2001, Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services.

(a) Analysis of problems related to career development in language services and review of vacancy rates in language services at some duty stations

In paragraph 30 of its resolution 53/208 B of 18 December 1998, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the Assembly at its fifty-third session analysing such problems as may exist related to career development in language services and taking into account the fact that the numbers and grade levels of staff should be commensurate with the needs of the Organization as well as the fact that requirements differ between languages as well as between duty stations.

A report has been prepared by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, in consultation with the Office of Human Resources Management.

Furthermore, at its substantive session of 1998, the Committee requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, through the Committee on Conferences, a report on the possibility of introducing a system of managed assignments, based on non-monetary incentives, that would alleviate the excessive vacancy rates in language services at some duty stations and ensure the required quality of conference services Secretariat-wide.

Since the two issues under this agenda item are interrelated, an addendum to the report already submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session will be prepared for submission to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, through the Committee on Conferences.

5. Organization of work.

6. Adoption of the report.